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THE IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II ON
AMERICAN LETTERS

-1939-

Thesis

by

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INTRODUCTION

On the eve of World War II in the year 1939, the American public was sensitive to its position in the affairs of the world. The men of culture and letters began to feel the impact of the European struggle, and they spoke the feelings they possessed. Words in this war were more important in shaping policies and opinions than they had ever been in any past war.

I shall endeavor to show the effect that World War II had on American thought as expressed in the works of American men of letters in the year 1939. Many of our prominent writers were spurred to intensive activity in an effort to meet the inevitable because they believed that America could not keep out of a struggle that involved most of Europe. These men lent their able pens to the propaganda of war in the belief that they could best serve by uniting America in the common cause which they knew she would be forced to take on as her own.

In this thesis, I shall examine the work that American men of letters produced in 1939. I shall deal exclusively with that which concerns itself with the European situation.

The following discussion will inevitably be about war, but the emphasis will be less on the military war of survival and more on the war of ideas and aspirations. It is, however, necessary to have at least an outline structure of events which led to 1939 and shaped the days of that year.

The first part of this essay, therefore, will deal with a general discussion of America's division of opinion. The second part will deal with the refined techniques of propaganda which had great actual and potential power in the United States in 1939. The third and longest part will deal with an examination of the written material which came out in 1939. An attempt will be made to show how these men of letters reacted under the impact of war. The fourth and last part will endeavor to appraise what the American men of letters did in uniting America in a year of struggle and indecision when, as a country, America desperately needed to stand firmly and unitedly on common ground.

CHAPTER I

AMERICA IS DIVIDED

On January 4, 1939, President Roosevelt in his annual message to Congress told this country to arm itself for defense, but as early as 1936 the Administration was aware of the fact that the government of Nazi Germany was a rival wherever the influence of the United States extended.¹ Roosevelt made our position clear, however, in his message when he said, "A war which threatened to envelop the world in flames has been averted, but it has become increasingly clear that peace is not assured. All about us rage undeclared wars, military and economic."² He mentioned the attacks on religion, democracy, and international good faith, knowing these things move a people when discussions of economic aggression leave them untouched. The truth is that the "Peace of Munich" which had given American isolationism a longer lease on life was beginning to give the President a serious headache. He was aware of the fact that the international situation demanded action which neither the American Congress nor the American public was ready to give. War had to be an imperative before isolationism would move.

Not until March 18, 1939 did the United States take two important steps. An extra tariff which amounted to embargo was placed upon German goods, and the Senate modified the Neutrality

1 Denys Smith, America and the Axis War, p. 175, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944.

2 James P. Warburg, Foreign Policy Begins at Home, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944.

Resolutions of 1938.³ America let the matter rest, but in Europe Hitler was directly defying agreements reached at Munich. Mussolini was boasting of his Italian Navy and its work. The Spanish Civil War had ended. The American people knew nothing of conditions in Spain; misinformation was rife.

The eminently effective Franco propaganda obscured facts which would have led to self-examination for democracies like the United States for their non-intervention.

It was not until April 15, 1939 that our President sent a message to both Hitler and Mussolini appealing for a peaceful settlement of difficulties.⁴ This message was certainly hopelessly late, and the request that the two dictators assure us that they had no designs upon any of the remaining countries of Europe was arrant nonsense. Mr. Roosevelt's suggestions for international conferences concerning reduction of armaments and freeing of international trade properly met with indirect rebuff from Mussolini. Adolph Hitler's disregard of the message could have been predicted.

September 1, 1939 the German armies marched into Poland, and two days later Britain and France and the British Dominions declared war. Our President decided it would be an suspicious time to address his people. In his address he condemned the use and the threat of force, which incidentally was in direct contradiction to his message to the same people earlier in the year.

³ Ibid., p. 144.

⁴ Ibid., p. 146.

Actually what he said to the American people was that it was now up to them to think about the European struggle. It would now be their lot to determine whether it was right for this nation or any democracy to long remain neutral in a world bent on war. Putting the question to the nation was a strategic move, whether consciously or not, because it meant that the President could preserve neutrality by every means possible as long as the people wished to remain neutral. In effect, the policy was this: The United States could stand aloof until the people asked for war. No nation clamors for war or willingly supports it until public opinion demands it, or has been made receptive by strong propaganda in favor of it. The machinery of propaganda which formulates foreign policy and affects and reflects the attitudes of the American people were set in motion.

Neutrality legislation was not such a simple matter as one might expect. Experience in the last war had amply proved that such law never worked out as it was intended to.⁵ Senator Borah and Charles Lindbergh were in the lead for maintaining neutrality. Former Secretary Stimson came out strongly for its repeal, while the President thought that all he could hope for was a repeal of the Arms Embargo. It was for the purpose of this repeal that he summoned a special session of Congress in which

⁵ Allan Nevins and Louis M. Hacker, The United States and Its Place In World Affairs 1918-1943, p. 408, Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1943.

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he said the embargo was dangerous to peace because the existing legislation was in effect unneutral.

For a month debate was hot in and out of Congress, and at the end of much tiresome talk a new law was enacted. Perhaps of equal importance with the new law was the establishment of five major isolationist principles which were destined to sway public opinion for two years.

The first principle was presented by Herbert Hoover who said that preponderant sea power and the French land defenses assured an Allied victory. Our help is not needed. The second principle was presented by Charles Lindbergh who loudly proclaimed that war meant abandoning democracy. The third was somewhat bitterly stated as the one that suggested that it is all over already so let's do business with Hitler. Lindbergh contributed the fourth principle by stating that we were secure behind our ocean lines. Senator Borah, who believed that the Fascist dictators could be handled if they were given colonies, access to raw materials, and an export market, gave us the fifth isolationist principle which affected American thought. He said that this war was just another imperialist war of power politics. All these arguments were taken up by many sincere and patriotic Americans. These Americans believed as strongly and as passionately as the other Americans who felt that we would be dragged into the European war.⁶

6 Ibid., Warburg, p. 154-155.

It is easy to go one step further and see that these five principles were caught up in the eager hands of a few Americans. They also became the fuel of organized native and foreign-inspired fascist groups. America was indeed divided because some good loyal Americans could not see our national safety threatened. They could never see that the United States could not remain a happy little island of democracy and freedom in an enslaved world. Many of the isolationists were idealists and in their idealic dream they drove a wedge into America that could do nothing but divide her. Immeasurably more difficult was the job of the propagandist for war after this. The task of arousing the country to its danger was increased at least tenfold. Despite this, Congress had adjourned at the end of July with Senator Borah's confident prediction, "There won't be any war," ringing in their ears.⁷

The world seemed moderately tranquil during the summer, but the fall brought increased activities.

On September 5, the Neutrality Proclamation and the Arms Embargo were put into effect. Simultaneously with these moves the President declared a state of "national emergency." Many Americans were ready to face the possibility of war now, but they had to content themselves with defending America by helping the Allies. Only a few on this side of the division went

7 Ibid., Smith, p. 209.

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so far as to demand a declaration of war. There were too many who assumed that our one vital national interest was to stay out of armed conflict.

Around the first of December, America was preoccupied with heroic little Finland who was being invaded by the large Soviet Union. Some Americans remembered that Finland was the only country to keep up its payments on the World War I debt. The war which England and France were fighting against Germany seemed tame to the American public at this time. Little Finland was being bullied by the Soviet Union. Sentiment against Russia in 1939 ran higher than sentiment against Germany. Isolationism could still hold the day because Russia's acts captured American attention when it could have been much more profitably directed toward Berlin. The deeply-resented acts of Russia toward Finland were viewed by most of us as brutal and inexcusable aggression. The war did seem to take on the aspects of an old-fashioned imperialist struggle. Communism indeed seemed to be making a bedfellow of fascism. We couldn't see the forest for the trees. If it had been possible for us to scan the later events it would have lessened the deep and lasting prejudice that some Americans hold to this day after more than three years of costly and heroic struggle and sacrifice on the part of the Russians.

The tension of the months of 1940 and the story of the increased defense program do not properly enter the discussion of this thesis, but it is well known that American public

opinion finally directed its attention toward Germany in April of 1940 when the Nazis invaded Denmark and Norway. America looked on with increasing concern when the whole Allied front collapsed in May as the German armies rolled over the Low lands. Dunkirk became history and the victorious German armies were opposite the cliffs of Dover and Hitler was master of western Europe. France fell. The year of division had passed as far as he was concerned. The American public could idle along for awhile, but the die was cast. America, who had always been the champion of freedom, would support those who struggled to gain it. The oppressed people of the world could take cheer. Americans' hands, heads and hearts were to be enlisted in their cause. The largest defense budget in the history of the nation would be adopted to support the project of America. Lend-Lease was to be introduced. The famous meeting of our President with Prime Minister Churchill which resulted in the proclaiming of the "Atlantic Charter" definitely asserted the intentions of the United States. This "Atlantic Charter" gave the people of the world a clear alternative to the Nazi Order of Conquest and slavery.

December 7, 1941 caused the people of the United States to think. The long struggle of the American people was ended indeed. America shook off the fetters of isolationism.

With this outline sketch of the background and foreground of 1939, which was our year of decision and division, we can intelligently face our main problem.

CHAPTER II

THE REFINED TECHNIQUES OF OUR RECEPITIVE AGE

Propaganda of the subtlest sort was rife in 1939. Berlin watched with a keen eye our reactions and acted in accord with what she observed, never discounting the importance of the tenor of the people who were her potentially strong enemy. Adolph Hitler could well be called the master of master propagandists, so he did not for a moment lose sight of the fact that American division was his powerful agent. He could not afford to have us actively meddling in his European theatre when he was the mighty "Tamburlaine" on his bloody stage.

Words and ideas were flung at us from all quarters in 1939. We listened first to one and then another, little seeing that we were becoming slaves to the strongest ones. The impact of these words was tremendous because they were hurled from the pens of experts long trained in the technique of propaganda. American men of letters flung many of them.

There were rules to the game which all schools of thought followed. They did not have to; they wished to. They were the most efficient set that man could devise when he wanted to influence his fellow man.

Public opinion was the one thing worth controlling in 1939. The isolationists wished to formulate it. The President wanted to sway it. Berlin was continually jockeying to control it. Minor factions fought bitterly to swing it in their favor. All these divergent groups, however, held one fact in common and

bowed to it. The age is an age of propaganda, and propaganda is nothing more than a method utilized for influencing public opinion on behalf of a premeditated end. Exciting events which were happening all around in 1939 put tremendous pressure on all sides. No one seemed to have the cool advantage of time which would have given perspective to the events which they were going to interpret.

America's foreign policy was of course a burning question and its immediate formulation was essential. From the signing of the Treaty of Versailles until September 3, 1939 when war again broke out in Europe, the world had been preparing itself for the open hostilities which formally began. September third was known for what it was--merely the formal beginning. Well-prepared armies of Reichsfuehrer Adolph Hitler marched openly over Poland and into the Maginot Line. Irony was having its day, for just twenty-five years before another generation crawled through the same mud in a war to end all wars.

What was it that had made the next generation ready to fight? It was a blending of many things--foreign policies, trade agreements, land poverty, greed, lack of "essential" raw materials, or lust for more territory. The catalyst which produced the action seems to have been brilliant propaganda which had an integral part in each country's war machine.

Just as soon as Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, the Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment became important. It was, in fact, his advance guard. Dr. Goebbel's

role was the one that was important in the Reich's march into Czechoslovakia, Austria, and the Sudetenland. This march was done virtually without resistance.⁸

The job of the propagandist is to unite a nation or a people before they have too much time to think if it is at all possible. In war, it is necessary for this propagandist to make a nation feel that it is fighting in self-defense. Persuaded sacrifices must be forced to the limit of endurance, and the propagandist must push into the distance the day when the people themselves cry for peace at any price, on any terms, in a voice which cannot be denied. War must never become the result of stupid, malevolent statesmanship, or international rivalries if the propagandist is doing his job well. War, like other important things to an individual, must become personal and take on aspects which arouse personal hatred and a sense of injustice if the war is to have the support of the necessary majority. Doubt as to certain victory must never enter the minds of the people of a fighting nation. Morale must not thus disintegrate. The burning hatred for the enemy must never die down. The propagandist is the one whose job it is to continually supply the fuel to keep this fire burning brightly. It is tragedy indeed when the hatred directed toward the enemy dissolves or is directed toward the government which led a people into war.

8 Harold Lavine and James Eschsler, War Propaganda and the United States, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940, p. 3.

The more academic question of the struggle for the conquest of American mind is our chief concern. This particular battle had to be fought and won or lost on American soil. 1939 was a year of struggle in the world, and the confusion penetrated the mind of mankind. Many parallelisms could be drawn between the stirred emotions and intellects of 1915-16-17 and the turmoil which caught us up short six years ago. Bryce reports with their feverish imaginings were reread and old atrocities were unearthed once more. Even references to the treatment of Belgium and the sinking of the Lusitania crept into the foreground of our thought. A movie of Edith Cavell, the English nurse who helped prisoners to escape to Allied territory was produced. People in 1939 disregarded the fact that her execution was entirely in accordance with international law. She made an ideal heroine for most Americans, who look on nursing with only profound respect. Adolph Hitler knew all these things and was not anxious to repeat in World War II many of the mistakes established as such after 1918.

Dr. Goebbels created the Amerikadeutscher Volksbund because he believed that Americans of German descent could be easily induced to support the Reich. In 1939 the slumbering racial consciousness did not awaken and the Volksbund was so unpopular in the United States after a series of eminently stupid moves, it was considered a disaster.⁹

9 Ibid., p. 35.

Hitler's concept of propaganda seemed to be that the cheapest means of demoralizing the enemy was to confuse him and make him capitulate. Military war was expensive so why use it when the war of words still had the power necessary to bewilder. It was of course the cheapest means of conquering the enemy as long as it worked. Hitler's highly organized forces took complete advantage of all resulting chaos which his techniques produced in a country.

From Hitler we borrowed many of our techniques. We could tell staggering lies as well as he. Propaganda is not primarily concerned with truth and never has been. It is essentially the art of persuasion which has within sight predetermined ends which dominate and color everything. Fiction is often more colorfully persuasive than fact. We tried to base our propaganda on truth, but on the other hand we have never been beneath embroidering it.

Emotionally, therefore, September 2, 1939 was the last day America could be at peace. Our men of letters began almost at once fixing the war guilt. Editorial columns all over the nation picked up the cudgels of blame. Europe looked over with intent fascination at the surface record of American thinking. September seems to have been filled with intense movements on both sides. Allied propagandists also looked to America and listened to hear what her men of letters would say.

In 1939 words could and did go winging around the world. The propaganda of Mr. Roosevelt mattered most. His messages

to Congress, his public speeches were framed to lead popular opinion. The President's gift of oratory served him well. Unlike some of his predecessors, he spoke often on European affairs. He spoke with force. People turned toward the White House. He was in no way averse to trying to reeducate the American people. He felt that the welfare of the United States and Great Britain was essentially parallel. Anglo-American understanding was his basis of propaganda for universal peace. Many critics saw baffling inconsistencies, but his basic views seemed to be clear in Berlin and London, and possibly in America. Mr. Roosevelt made no pretense to talk to a research staff. He was talking in language understood by the majority. The tangled map of Europe could be understood by experts, but the President's job was to have it as familiar as "Main Street" to the run-of-the-mill Americans.

The ten commandments for the propagandist never included candor. Heartstrings of people are not sacred to him. Toward the end of 1939, America was asked to look at its children. God quite suddenly took a prominent place in the news. Some ministers started bending the plowshares back into swords. Freedom became a popular subject. God appeared with increasing frequency on the Allied side. Peace was spoken of as a "moral peace." Symbols of Christianity received homage and attention which had not been their lot for years. The propagandist seems to have caught up with Reverend Harry Emerson Fosdick, who once suggested that the best way for Christians to make a war

seem holy was to somehow get Christ in the conflict. Spiritual consolation certainly left the "gold standard" in 1939. The propaganda war on American soil invaded the religious realms with a speed that appalled a few clear-eyed men.

Relief and propaganda went hand in hand in 1939. Pro-Ally peace societies had a mushroom growth. Books on German philosophy were published. The United States was reading and talking itself into war in 1939, and some of us didn't even know it because our propagandists did have subtle techniques which had been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt. Our receptivity was manifested in our tabulated reactions. Like puppets we moved when the master hand pulled a string.

CHAPTER III

THE PRODUCT OF AMERICAN MINDS

One by one the lamps of European culture were going out in 1939. The impact of war had dealt a stunning blow across the Atlantic, but in the United States the lamps still sent forth their light. We maintained a robust regionalism in our literature in spite of the international crisis which was reshaping the map and literature of Europe.

American literature took on a sudden strong consciousness of the American idea, the American faith. This articulate expression of concern showed itself in a very real way in the number and popularity of books published dealing with American history both in fiction and non-fictionized forms. As a nation, we became conscious of our past and its greatness. As a nation, we began to learn "The Star-Spangled Banner." We began to try to sing it in public.

Another facet of life in 1939 was the large scale migration of refugee scholars who adopted America, and spoke and wrote to Americans. Some of these exceptionally gifted people spoke with loud voices which could not be denied. They raised vital questions with a candor which we could not ignore. Some of the best minds of Germany and Austria came to our shores in this decisive year and worked for us, but wrote concerning their hopes and beliefs for future freedom. The impact of their words strangely moved many citizens of their adopted country. The words which

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these people wrote became a vital part of the products of American minds in 1939.

Practically everybody who stood for German culture was a refugee, and the countries who received these people can gain from them. Erika and Klaus Mann, the eldest children of Thomas Mann are a good example for this point. They have written an important book describing the beginnings of this cultural migration from Europe. The book, Escape to Life, gives portrait after portrait of gifted people.¹⁰ The human riches that had already left the part of Europe barbarized by Hitler is quite beyond belief until you see them put down in black and white.

Escape to Life raises some vital questions. First, is the still democratic world making full use of the gifted refugees? The Manns cite many instances where talented men and women are busy working in their adopted country. Yet there is terrible waste going on. Are German and Austrian musicians being fully used? The book tells a great deal about what the best minds of Germany and Austria hope and believe of the future of freedom and the chances of an after-Hitler Germany. There is just enough about the underground movement to show that the cause of the true, civilized Germany has heroic martyrs.

The public was sensitive to the world situation. This year, so tumultuous, saw the publishing of two unexpurgated

¹⁰ Klaus and Erika Mann, Escape to Life, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1939.

editions of Mein Kampf with all the torrential verbiage, racial nonsense, and egocentric emotionalism and shrewdness characteristic of Hitler. The book reveals a zealot's desire for a strong nation. It tells how Der Fuehrer is compelled to rely on loyal experts on financial and economic questions. It explains much that is exploding in Europe and that is reverberating in this hemisphere. Mussolini, Red and Black, the source book on Il Duce, written by Armado Barghi, was finally published in America.

Several men of letters turned their attention to new fields. Realizing the growing importance of the influence of the radio, they began writing radio scripts and planning programs for big commercial companies like Firestone and Ford and Standard Brands. Alexander Woollcott, Steinbeck, O. Wells, and a host of others accepted these lucrative positions and in a dramatic fashion mingled fact and fiction and sent it winging across the miles spreading its path of influence in places where the printed word never penetrated. These men, like the authors of books, offered their talents on the altar of public enlightenment. They, too, felt the impact of impending war.

Hollywood, with its tremendous motion picture industry, geared itself for war. In 1939 some eighty-five million persons in the United States attended the movies each week.¹¹ To these people, the movies were often the main avenue of entertainment.

¹¹ Margaret Farrand Throp, America at the Movies, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939.

From them they gleaned their ideas about Germany and our other potential enemies. In 1939, the movie industry, always quick to capitalize on public gullibility and interest, went into mass production of spy movies. It was in this year that "Edith Cavell" was produced. The people who went to see this picture saw the brave English nurse shot by barbaric German soldiers. They did not stop to consider that Germany was well within the bounds of International Law; they only saw strutting brutality force a woman and nurse to her death. Such a picture as this, the product of trained Americans, was presented to an untrained and emotional theatre audience.

1939 was certainly the year when the influence of non-fiction came into its own in the United States. American artists didn't have to fictionalize their thoughts if they didn't want to. Truth was poignantly exciting.

Dalton Trumbo's documented book, Johnny Got His Gun, is probably a very pertinent example of what I mean.¹² To me, it is one of the most horrifying books ever written. Without an occasional respite, it is almost more than mind and stomach can bear. It speaks of "basket cases"--armless, legless creatures. It tells of Joe Bonham who went to war to fight men with whom he had no quarrel. He went to a war he did not understand and came out armless, legless, deaf, dumb, and blind, but alive. There was only a hole where his eyes, nose, and mouth

12 Dalton Trumbo, Johnny Got His Gun, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1939.

had been--a gaping hole covered with a mask. He was alive. He could think. He could feel. He could remember the days when he was complete. He was the triumph of the surgeon's art--a living dead man. The book goes on to tell how he rose gradually to the surface of consciousness. It tells how he discovered he was deaf, legless, armless, and with no face. This terrific indictment of war reached a far wider audience than did any direct argument. It affected one member of that audience with a force that no direct argument could ever hope to achieve.

American minds gave us several sensational books dealing with current events. Hamilton Fish Armstrong produced such a volume when he wrote his When There Is No Peace.¹³ The little book contains a factual retracing of the path that led to Munich. It is actually a chronology of events. It contributes much to the general understanding of contemporary matters. Despite the fact that conclusions are left to the individual, one readily realizes that Munich is a truce for which democracies will pay dearly. Professor Schuman reads the same handwriting on the wall and sees the damned aid their destroyers in bringing faggots to their own stakes. He ably discusses the matter in his book, Europe on the Eve: The Crisis of Diplomacy 1933-39.¹⁴ He assesses the strategic, economic, and political results of Munich.

13 Hamilton Fish Armstrong, When There Is No Peace, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939.

14 Frederick L. Schuman, Europe on the Eve: The Crisis of Diplomacy 1933-39, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939.

Frank P. Davidson and George S. Viereck, Jr. noticed that after Munich public debate on American foreign policy had grown hotter and fiercer and, incidentally, more confused. They stressed the idea that foreign policies like war policies should be planned. Emotional bias should not constitute the determining factors of our decision. They noted the growing American tendency to depict a black-and-white division of the world into dictatorships and democracies. In their book, Before America Decides: Foresight in Foreign Affairs, they endeavor to establish intelligent avenues of observation ~~regardless~~ of whether America enters the war or not.¹⁵

Louis Bromfield also turns to a discussion on current affairs by landing a literary brickbat on the doorsteps of 10 Downing Street. In England: A Dying Oligarchy he declares that the wealthy oligarchy that rules England is betraying both the Empire and its own interests in frantically attempting to hang on.¹⁶ He predicts the fall of the British Empire if conditions are not changed. Mr. Bromfield suggests that men of vision must take their place if democracy is to be saved by Anglo-American co-operation.

A woman comes in with her opinions on the situation.

15 Frank P. Davidson and George S. Viereck, Jr., Editors, Before America Decides: Foresight in Foreign Affairs, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939.

16 Louis Bromfield, England: A Dying Oligarchy, New York; Harper and Brothers, 1939.

Vera Micheles Dean in her Europe in Retreat writes of the Franco-British surrender to Hitler at Munich.¹⁷ In vivid language she describes the situation when Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Hitler met. The fanatic Hitler was neither a gentleman nor a business man. Mr. Chamberlain was completely baffled by this mad man. Vera Dean's interest in world affairs is unquestioned and to them she brings a keen insight into the personalities of the two men who were destined to make history.

After Munich had been carefully considered, American men began discussing the roles of the individual countries. Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Austria all had their champions among us. The publishing houses in the United States continually turned out the products of American minds. As 1939 passed we got increasing amounts of non-fiction which dealt with European countries.

Among the best of this material is G. E. R. Gedye's Betrayal in Central Europe published by Harper and Brothers.¹⁸ The book gives an eyewitness account of the Czechoslovakian surrender which seems to be accurate in detail. The author states most emphatically that the betrayal in Europe was not a sudden and spontaneous event in 1938, but rather the result of cumulative mistakes, intrigues, and surrenders. Mr. Gedye gives his readers a case study in Nazi penetration and triumph.

17 Vera Micheles Dean, Europe In Retreat, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939.

18 G. E. R. Gedye, Betrayal in Central Europe, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939.

He also pictures with painful vividness Anglo-French acquiescence and connivance. Mr. Gedy, naturally enough, sees through the keen eyes of a modern journalist. He gives one a vivid picture of the peoples of Europe--the Jews and the Czechs.

A more romantic picture of the Czech people is seen through the eyes of Maurice Hindus. His inspired book, We Shall Live Again certainly caught up the beaten but undefeated spirit of a brave people.¹⁹ The reader sees, perhaps for the first time, the people of Czechoslovakia in their homes, at their churches, their weddings, their wine festivals, and even their funerals. The book does not lack political insight or social appraisal because of its intimate study of the people. It is as balanced as one could wish for when one's task is to show a people who have a death grip on hope.

Raymond Leslie Buell turns his attention toward Poland and rapidly arrives at the conclusion that a geographic curse is the main cross for this country. Dr. Buell's book, Poland: Key to Europe, is a conscientious effort to appraise the situation in Poland in 1939.²⁰ While he makes it clear that he feels that geography is the key to Poland's trouble with the Nazi party, he does not hesitate to give a substantial amount of political, economic and social background. Dr. Buell seems quite able to get behind the European headlines, and he seems anxious to

19 Maurice Hindus, We Shall Live Again, New York: Doubleday Doran & Company, 1939.

20 Raymond Leslie Buell, Poland: Key to Europe, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939.

equip the American public with a sufficient amount of fact to enable them to follow him.

The internal disintegration of Austria seems to be ably portrayed by Martin Fuchs in his book, Showdown in Vienna.²¹ The book concerns itself mainly with Hitlerian diplomacy which was rife in Austria in the months before its downfall. Mr. Fuchs ably ferrets out Nazi intrigue and points one hand at Berlin. Before one finishes the book it is evident where the other hand is pointing. With many other thinking men, Mr. Fuchs does not hesitate to point it directly at Anglo-French hesitancy and stupidity.

The Vampire Economy by Guenther Reimann is a well written, comprehensive study of economic and social conditions in Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.²² This book stands out because it penetrates to the heart of the situation in Germany. It explains the war machine and its economic structure that reaches out like an octopus and crushingly embraces every man, woman and child under German rule.

Dorothy Thompson brings her keen mind to bear on the chaotic situation in the world. In her book, Let the Record Speak, she takes headline after headline and interprets them for the people of the United States.²³ Her frankly stated aim is

21 Martin Fuchs, Showdown in Vienna, New York; G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939.

22 Guenther Reimann, The Vampire Economy, New York: Vanguard Press, 1939.

23 Dorothy Thompson, Let the Record Speak, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939.

to try to see "tomorrow's truth behind today's propaganda."

Blood Is Cheaper Than Water, by Quincy Howe is a bristling little book with many debatable assertions.²⁴ He states that people are divided into two parts--those who believe that the United States should take part in the next general war, and those who believe we should remain neutral. With reluctance, Mr. Howe admits that the war party now commands the field. He says that he believes we should fight because the peace party has little to offer as an alternative. With malice aforethought, the author makes his contribution to our current pamphleteering literature.

Another brilliant book about conditions governing Hitler's birth and growth is Peter Drucker's The End of Economic Man: A Study of the New Totalitarianism.²⁵ Convinced that the tragic plight of democracies can largely be explained by their repeated failure to understand the dynamics of totalitarian revolutions, he writes concerning the war, inflation, and depression which prepared Germany for a change. Drucker believes that so thorough was her preparation that Germany was willing to entrust herself to a man whose promises were disbelieved by his followers and whose threats were ridiculed by his opponents.

24 Quincy Howe, Blood Is Cheaper Than Water, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1939.

25 Peter Drucker, The End of Economic Man: A Study of the New Totalitarianism, New York: John Day, 1939.

Armies of Spies by Joseph Goldbomb is an exciting non-fiction book of 1939.²⁶ It is mainly concerned with up-to-date fashions in spydom. It is very informative about the training of European spies, and tells in vivid words the exploits of some of the best known masters of the art who are incidentally German and Austrian.

Two other excellent books on spy activities are John L. Spivak's book, Secret Armies and Richard Wilmer Rowan's book, Secret Agents in America.²⁷²⁸ Spivak's book is possibly the better of the two, being document and quite authoritative on the Bund activities. Both tell of the new techniques developed in Nazi warfare, but again, Mr. Spivak seems to be superior.

Emil Lengyel has written an informative book, The Danube, which is about the political tangles of various countries watered by the Danube.²⁹ These countries he feels are enmeshed in the past and caught in the present.

Lucien Zaharoff in his book entitled This Is War, stresses the point that today as never before war threatens every man, woman and child.³⁰ Quite clearly current conflicting ideologies

26 Joseph Goldbomb, Armies of Spies, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939.

27 John L. Spivak, Secret Armies, New York: Modern Age Books, 1939.

28 Richard Wilmer Rowan, Secret Agents in America, New York: Doubleday Doran and Co., 1939.

29 Emil Lengyel, The Danube, New York: Random House, 1939.

30 Lucien Zaharoff, This Is War, New York: Sheridan House, 1939.

are discussed. The importance of air power is stressed, and his look into future warfare is vividly horrible. His discussion of what can happen can well be regarded as the twentieth-century Black Plague.

The March of Fascism by Stephen Raushenbush is calculated to shake even the most confirmed case of complacency in the United States in 1939.³¹ The very sobriety of its style is cause for thought. Mr. Raushenbush ties up the sinister mark of Nazism in Fascist Europe to situations in the United States.

Toni Sender in his Autobiography of a German Rebel, writes of the tide of Antiliberalism in the world.³² He deplores the fact that it rolls on unchecked while people vainly but feverishly strive to detect its causes.

America at War, by Professor Frederic L. Paxson deals primarily with the last war--April 1917 to November 1918.³³ The thing which makes it eminently timely is the parallel which it draws between then and today's situation. Professor Paxson writes in such a manner that pride of country breathes through every page, but his language is forceful when he reminds the people of this nation that they cannot blunder into war; we must make up our minds in advance.

31 Stephen Raushenbush, The March of Fascism, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939.

32 Toni Sender, The Autobiography of a German Rebel, New York: The Vanguard Press, 1939.

33 Frederic L. Paxson, America at War, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1939.

The European situation which so powerfully engrossed our men of letters after the Munich affair brought out a great deal of critical work directed at the policies of England and France. Germany received our unqualified condemnation eventually, but in 1939 England and France certainly came in for their share of blame at the hands of our literary men.

England and Her "Poor Relation" by Professor Raymond Sontag gave us a new historical insight into the Anglo-German antagonism which he stated has constituted for half a century one of the most baffling sources of international friction.³⁴ The author understood and pointed out that the tension between the two great Teutonic nations of Europe cannot be adequately understood as a mere problem of diplomatic history, but as a clash between peoples of different outlook and philosophy. He is not at all satisfied with telling once again the story of Anglo-German diplomatic relations, nor by adding the history of their commerical rivalries. He tries to illuminate the cleavage in their national philosophies then and now. The book goes deeper than most in trying to answer the present "why" of war with one another.

Reaching for the Stars by Nora Waln is about Nazi Germany.³⁵ It is written by a woman who spent four years with her husband

34 Raymond J. Sontag, England and Her "Poor Relation": Background of Conflict 1844-1894, New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1939.

35 Nora Waln, Reaching for the Stars, Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1939.

under the Nazi flag. In these four years, Nora Waln learned to understand and love the German people. She learned to pity them in their present plight. The book became a nation-wide best seller, but that isn't the point. It seems to me to be one of the most beautiful and moving tributes to Germany and one of the most damning documents on Hitlerism that has come from any pen. Vividly waves the scarlet, white, and black flag. Green-jacketed, black-trousered, and black-booted youth "Heil Hitler" across the pages of this fascinating book. As one reads, one sees carefully kept forests, tidy farmsteads, party purges, growing death rolls, but somewhere within its pages are caught expressions of Germany's greatness. Strains of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony are whispered, and in one's heart there comes a renewed confidence in the hope of the world.

Not Peace but a Sword, by Vincent Sheean, is a book of an unusual mixture of politics and autobiography.³⁶ Mr. Sheean tells the story of his life and work from March 1938 to March 1939. This story is told in a beautiful prose which shows a love for the use of English. It is also told by a man who thinks, a man who digs down and brings up something worth hearing. Not Peace but a Sword is an extremely moving book written with feeling and emotion, but one is aware that the author is an accomplished master of irony. Mr. Sheean gives a subdued but merciless dissection of the British mind. The book begins

36 Vincent Sheean, Not Peace but a Sword, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1939.

with England, proceeds to Spain, deals briefly with Austria, returns to Spain, and concludes in Czechoslovakia and Spain again. Mr. Sheean is never content merely to describe, he always takes sides. There is no division of his mind in this book. It is on one note. He passionately hates Fascism.

The material written in 1939 in the United States concerning Germany exclusively was unquestionably bulky. There was a literary barrage against Fascism and Nazism. Fascist and Nazi countries were no longer political states. They were a state of mind, and because of that important fact American minds could grapple with the problem.

Lewis Mumford in his book, Men Must Act wanted America to promptly take her stand on a policy on non-intercourse with Germany.³⁷

Herbert J. Seligmann added his bit when he wrote his discussion of the Nordic myth in his book entitled Race Against Man.³⁸ He candidly examines the storehouse of prejudices man has built up. The Jew, the Negro, and the Nordic stand side by side in such a way that the United States can readily realize that Germany isn't the only hothouse cultivating race myths.

Inside Germany by Herr Albert C. Grzesinski, a German in America has a particularly potent plea because the methods of the Third Reich and its propaganda are recent events in the mind

37 Lewis Mumford, Men Must Act, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939.

38 Herbert J. Seligmann, Race Against Man, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939.

of this man who is in the United States.³⁹ The emphasis of the whole book is on the importance Hitler places on his propaganda and especially its use in foreign relations. Herr Grzesinski, too, believes that Munich was an incalculable disaster. His last and strongest plea in the book is to oppose Nazism, the Black Plague of Twentieth-century which seemed to be rolling along unchecked throughout the world.

All these men, despite the fact that their concern may be more or less limited to a specific geographic area, feel the general conflict of ideologies--a problem which must be solved if civilization is to survive. Whether a man's gifts lie in the field of imagination or fact; whether his tongue is satiric or gentle; his purpose is one. The human life must survive. It must have a chance to live in a world where the threat of war is not the potential eventuality of every man, woman, and child.

Dr. Barnes writes an extremely realistic book on social problems hoping that through education, man may learn to avoid the wastes of revolution and violence. Society in Transition is no panacea for social ills, but it is a thoughtful, scholarly book which aims to help man solve his problems of war, crime, poverty, sex, etc.⁴⁰

Turning from the field of non-fiction which seems to me to be especially important in 1939 because so many of our men of

39 Albert C. Grzesinski, Inside Germany, New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1939.

40 Henry Elmer Barnes, Society in Transition, New York: Prentice Hall, 1939.

letters chose to express themselves openly and clearly, I should like to continue the discussion of the impact of the European conflict on American letters in the field of poetry.

One of our best known poets, Edna St Vincent Millay had a productive year. She published a collection of poems entitled, Huntsman, What Quarry?⁴¹ In it, and one of her best, is a poignant and sober "Sonnet on Czechoslovakia."

Robert P. Tristram Coffin's honest homespun poetry had woven into it something useful and noble and of national fabric. Mr. Coffin's poetry has always been written as sturdy but never eagle-screaming Americanism. In the collection he published in 1939 one does not look in vain for the touch of war. He, with Benét and Frost and Untermeyer, pick up their pens and write down for the ages some of the stress and strain that the world feels as she again struggles with war.

Many American authors felt deeply concerned about war and man's part in it. They realized that their strongest appeal still lay in the realm of fiction--the realm in which they had long been past masters. These artists were quite aware of the fact that they wrote very little that did not express an attitude toward life or a view of the world which they wished to have their reader share with them. All of them were, to that extent, guilty of propaganda. There was a time when one felt quite confident of the boundary line between literature and

⁴¹ Edna St Vincent Millay, Huntsman, What Quarry?, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939.

propaganda but in war years it is all but impossible to say where one begins and the other ends in many cases.

Many novels published in the United States in 1939 had a social message within them. This spirit ran high, and when it was kindled by the added spark of war the result was a literature with a backbone of purpose or propaganda, if you wish.

Mr. Emmanuel, by Louis Golding is one of the best examples of this period literature which American minds produced under the impact of war.⁴² It is the story of a refugee German-Jewish lad who is eating his heart out in England because he doesn't know whether his mother is dead or alive. Mr. Isaac Emmanuel watches the child with full pity so characteristic of the older Jew for the young of his kind. He decides that he will go to Hitler's Germany with his English passport to see about the matter. The little, old Jew is horrified at the exhibitions of Nazism. Mr. Golding, being an intelligent artist, knew that we would be profoundly moved by the personalized story of a single human being caught. Mr. Isaac Emmanuel becomes a symbolic knight-errant. He becomes the symbol of a race who looks back on Egypt and Rome and will one day look back on Germany.

Going into the field of fiction which is specifically about the war in Europe, one turns almost at once to Nevil Shute's Ordeal.⁴³ It is the story of the Corbett family who

42 Louis Golding, Mr. Emmanuel, New York: The Viking Press, 1939.

43 Nevil Shute, Ordeal, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1939.

lived in Southampton during the first weeks of the war--the first weeks which were so terrible because they were so unexpectedly mysterious. Official information was pathetically meager. The story is simple, but it is entirely credible and extremely absorbing.

Swastika by Oscar Schisgall gives one a more thrilling tale of the war because it has for its background Germany.⁴⁴ Carol and Eric Traub make a short visit to Germany, and despite the fact that they are rather flat, the background is full and vigorous. While they are helping to liquidate the business of Eric's father, Fascism reaches out to engulf two more people. Carol is an American while Eric is German-born. She is shocked at the brutal excesses of the Nazi Order. Eric, on the other hand, is possessed by a new racial pride. He finds justification for everything. The reader sees the parades, hears the speeches, and even catches a glimpse at Hitler. The process of harrying the Jews becomes painfully vivid. The unique method of silencing doubters is realistically brutal. From this book one catches the intense excitement in Berlin.

Another novel of Nazi Germany is Ethel Vance's Escape.⁴⁵ It is a story packed with suspense and tension. The author piles up thrilling incidents around a once famous German actress who had lived for years in the United States, but returned to

44 Oscar Schisgall, Swastika, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939.

45 Ethel Vance, Escape, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939.

Germany, her native land, to sell some property. Humor and grimness walk hand and hand across the pages of this book. The actress is arrested and sentenced to death for subversive activities. A young German doctor who has worshipped her from afar operates on her when she is ill in prison. A long story of her escape in a coffin from the prison follows and she once again breathes free air.

A very engrossing story of present-day England is seen in Bruce Hamilton's novel, Traitor's Way.⁴⁶ It is the story of an average man who is innocently involved in a Fascist conspiracy. The book is swift, exciting fiction.

Address Unknown by Kressman Taylor is one of the most moving stories of Nazi Germany that I have ever read.⁴⁷ It is a powerful tale told through letters about what living in such a country does to human beings--how it makes them forget to love--forget to be human.

One House Contains Us by Oscar Lenord is a fascinating story of romance linked with graft in national politics which takes place in the Rumanian capital.⁴⁸ The plot, to some, may be too fantastic, but the description of the people is excellent

46 Bruce Hamilton, Traitor's Way, Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1939.

47 Kressman Taylor, Address Unknown, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939.

48 Oscar Lenord, One House Contains Us, New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1939.

and the pictures of the country in and about the capital are beautifully done.

W. Somerset Maugham produced a novel in 1939 which is centered upon the life of an English boy vacationing in Paris.

Christmas Holiday tells of this lad's disillusionment because of the chaos which he sees.⁴⁹ It pictures his return to England and the lack of understanding which his father has for him when he needs him. Age has made the mess that exists in Paris, yet age will not help youth along the path which is leading into their war.

On the whole the fiction does not seem to present such an outstanding list as the non-fiction does in this year of decision which is quite possibly significant. It seems to me that while the fiction is good, the emphasis is on the non-fiction because the static events of the world call for explanation not amusement.

49 W. Somerset Maugham, Christmas Holiday, New York: Doubleday Doran, 1939.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

American public opinion in 1939 was the important thing to control. The fine art of propaganda was rife both at home and abroad. It was mainly the planned work of experts who were following well-established rules which were eminently successful--so successful, in fact, that it was almost impossible to tell where propaganda ended and literature began.

Non-fictional literature was most important in 1939. The field of fiction was marked by a strain of social consciousness. There were a few authors who lent their talents to the field of radio, and influenced a wider audience. Others enlisted in the work being done at Hollywood which was seen by millions.

The impact of World War II on American letters was felt, and the results have been studied and catalogued. It is my considered judgment that this year, so decisive in world history, cannot be said to have been decisive in literature because it was not a year which was conducive of great work. However, 1939 did give the American people one extremely outstanding gift--the little, bespectacled Kangaroo came to them on the "Pocket Books" and time has proven them to be a worthy gift for millions.

COMPREHENSIVE ABSTRACT

The eve of World War II in 1939 found the American public sensitive to its position in the affairs of the world. American men of letters spoke the feelings they possessed, and their opinions were heard by millions. These articulate expressions were important in shaping policies that influenced coming events. Many able pens were lent to the propaganda of war.

The first chapter deals with the division found in the United States in 1939. I have endeavored to trace the important steps which led our nation into the ununited position beginning with the President's annual message to Congress on January 4, 1939. I have tried to establish the fact that America's division in 1939 was no accident of chance, but rather the planned work of trained technicians. Words and ideas were flung at us from all quarters, and we listened first to one and then another.

The second chapter is concerned with the refined techniques of our receptive age. Rules in the game of propaganda were well established and efficient. Berlin and President Roosevelt were continually jockeying to control public opinion. No faction seemed to have the cool advantage of time which would have given perspective to the events which they were seeking to control.

America's foreign policy was the burning question, and its immediate formulation was essential. All involved nations

were, in fact, making just desperate efforts to build up their policies and set in motion their propaganda machines.

The job of the modern propagandist is to unite a nation or a people before they have too much time to think for themselves. It is essential that one fight in self-defense, and that the day be distant when the people themselves cry for peace at any price on any terms. War, like other important things to an individual, must become personal. Doubt of certain victory must never enter the minds of the people of a fighting nation. The propagandist is the one whose job it is to continually supply the fuel to keep this fire burning brightly.

From Hitler we borrowed many of our techniques. We found that we could tell staggering lies as well as he. We accepted quite readily the proposition that propaganda is not primarily concerned with truth and never has been.

September 2, 1939 was the last day America could be said to be at peace. After this date, our men of letters began almost at once fixing the war guilt. Editorial columns all over the nation picked up the cudgels of blame while Europe looked over with intent fascination at the record of American thinking.

In 1939 words could and did go winging around the world. From the United States, the propaganda of Mr. Roosevelt mattered most. He framed his every utterance to lead popular opinion, and his gift of oratory served him well.

Toward the end of 1939, America was asked to look to its children. God quite suddenly took a prominent place in the

news. Plowshares were bent back into swords. The United States was reading and talking itself into war, and some of us didn't even know it.

Chapter three is an examination of the products of American minds and an attempt to evaluate the impact that the world situation had on this material. One of the first manifestations of the impact was a strong consciousness and concern for things American. A second facet of life which affected American letters was the large-scale migration of refugee scholars who came to our shores and raised vital questions concerning their hopes and beliefs. The impact of their words strangely moved us. The movies and the radio were influential in this decisive year.

In 1939, non-fiction came into its own. Some of this non-fiction was more sensational in its truth than many of the most fantastic novels. Events leading up to Munich seemed to be the source material for much of this type of writing. American men also discussed the roles of individual countries. Whether a man's gift lay in the field of imagination or fact; whether his tongue was satiric or gentle; his purpose was one. Human life must have a chance to survive in a world where the threat of war is not an eventuality to every man, woman, and child.

Turning to fiction one sees the work of men who were deeply concerned about war and man's part in it. They realized that their strongest appeal still lay in the realm of fiction--the realm in which they had long been past masters.

Many novels published in the United States in 1939 had a social message in them, and the spark of war kindled a high spirit in them.

Aside from books which were obviously about the war, there were other works which may stand the critical test of time when some of these timely books may be forgotten, but discussion of these books is not the concern of this thesis.

In conclusion, I have found that the impact of World War II left an unmistakable mark on American letters. Non-fiction came into its own because the public demanded facts and was interested in them. Fiction seemed to be marked by a social consciousness. It was mainly timely, and in that fact possibly lies its death as far as posterity is concerned because there was little produced in 1939 which measures high on the yardstick of greatness in the field of literature.

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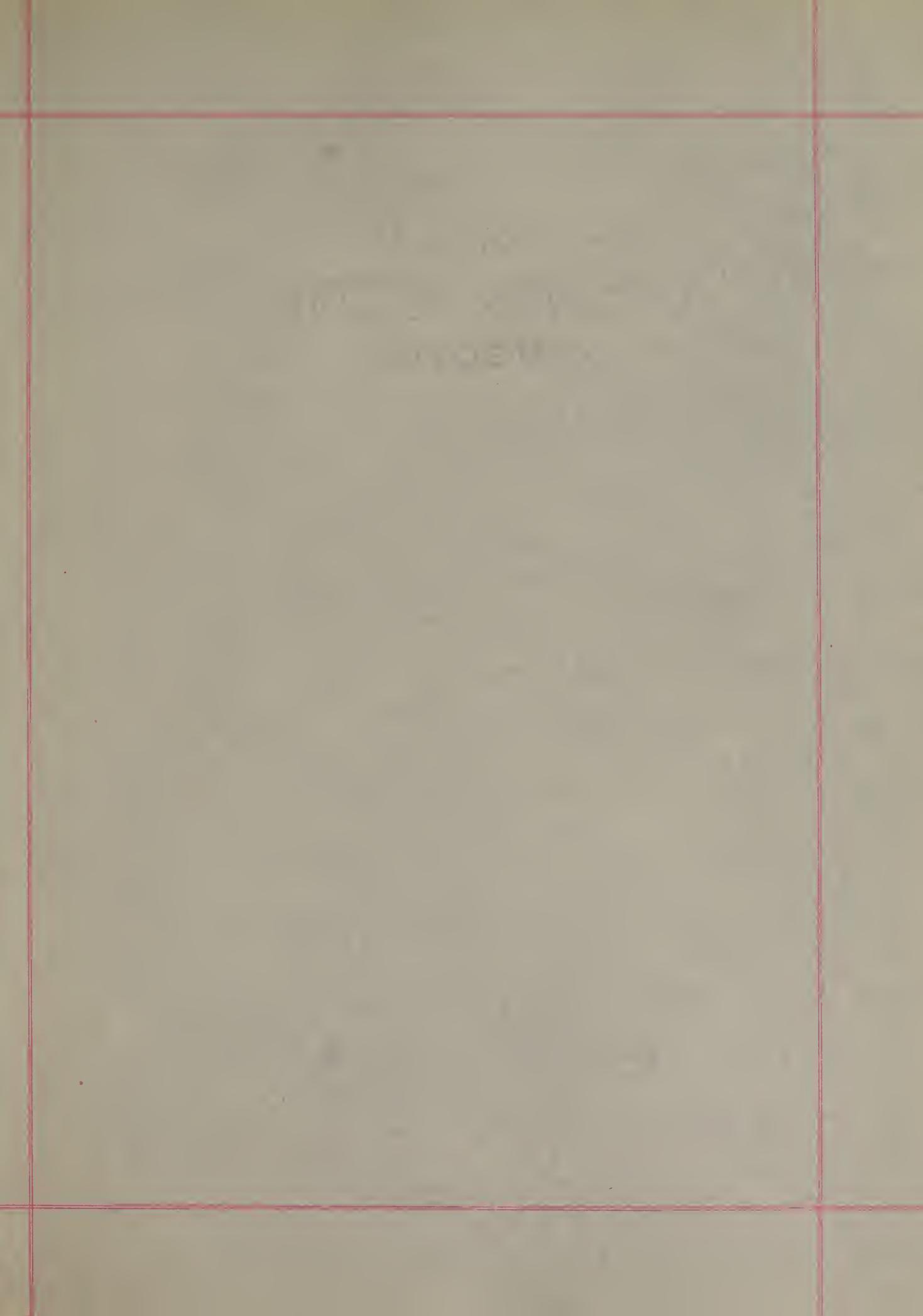
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